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## NRO &amp; OSD Declassification/Release Instructions on File 10 April 1962

National Policy on Satellite Reconnaissance (S)

1. Problem. To define the national policy on satellite reconnaissance activities, including their conduct, security, public disclosure, and political aspects.
2. Factors Bearing on the Problem. Several factors have a significant bearing upon the determination of an adequate and defensible policy, and in the determination of the steps necessary for its successful implementation.

a. U. S. national policy already publicly acknowledged at the highest level includes military space effort necessary for national defense. Such effort has been publicly disclosed as bona fide military effort, and not merely scientific experiments by the military or the support of such experiments by military resources. This is not in any way inconsistent with the national policy on the peaceful uses of outer space, since the military space program has also been disclosed as peaceful, non-aggressive means of enhancing our defense against aggressive attack.

b. The U. N. General Assembly, in unanimously passing Resolution 1721(XVI) established the fact that international law applies to outer space and that outer space is free for exploration and use by

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7

all States in conformity with international law, and is not subject to national appropriation.

c. Appeal to potentially wide usefulness of observation satellites is not a viable defense for reconnaissance activities unless the mere fact that observations are made from a satellite is sufficient for defense of all observation satellites, which seems most improbable. In this case there would be no need to involve satellite reconnaissance activities at all, since this defense could be based entirely upon meteorological satellite projects already publicly disclosed. If defense depends in any manner upon the type of such observation, then the fact must be faced that reconnaissance photography is primarily useful only as an intelligence gathering method, for reasons discussed in paragraph g below, and cannot plausibly be defended on the basis of scientific or ancillary utility.

d. What the Soviets may choose to do in regard to conducting reconnaissance from satellites should have no bearing upon U. S. satellite reconnaissance activities. Regardless of what they choose to do, it is clear that the value of such reconnaissance is infinitely greater to the U. S. than it is to the Soviets, due to the extreme differences between our open society and their tightly closed society.

e. Effective reconnaissance requires surprise and secrecy. Even if the Soviets were officially to declare publicly, in writing, that they had absolutely no objection whatsoever to the U. S. flying reconnaissance

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satellites over Soviet territory, it would still be imperative that the actual details and timing of these activities be conducted in secrecy. Effective reconnaissance requires concealment of the particular types of missions, the technical approaches used in the sensors, and the timing of all such activities. Without such secrecy, it would be a relatively simple matter to protect sensitive electronic signal emissions while satellites which could sense them are in range. This is considerably less practical when numerous objects are in orbit and it is not known which ones are equipped to obtain this information. Furthermore, knowledge of the particular photographic capabilities and timing of photographic missions would enable relatively simple countermeasures which could conceal vital information during the time such missions are in range and greatly reduce the actual effectiveness of such missions. This, too, becomes much less practical with larger numbers of satellites for which the mission is not known for certain and for which precise orbital data is available only after substantial coverage has been obtained.

1. Secrecy does not mean that illegal activities are being conducted. The practice of conducting legal, though secret, military operations in international waters and air space has long been established. There is no reason why the U. S. should allow the lack of disclosure of details, timing, and results of satellite reconnaissance efforts to be taken as a concession of illegality. The fact that such details are not disclosed is

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relevant only if we allow it to become relevant by reacting defensively to criticism in this regard. There is nothing inherently illegal in and no basis for criticism of secrecy of activities conducted on international waters or in international air space; there is consequently no basis for valid objection in international space.

g. There are several aspects of reconnaissance photography which are significant.

(1) The current state of the art in satellite operation, and the technical characteristics of reconnaissance photography are such that public disclosure of such photography under any other name will not camouflage its basic purpose. Neither is there any possibility of passing mapping photography as reconnaissance photography, due to important and significant differences between these two types of photography. Mapping photography is characterized by high geometric fidelity but very poor resolution, on the order of several hundred feet. Reconnaissance photography includes substantial geometric distortion but must have high resolution in order that missile sites, etc., may be identified. There is no known ancillary use of this type of photography that could possibly account for the current expense and effort of acquiring the photography by satellites. Any attempt to explain such current activities on the basis of scientific and public service functions would be most unrealistic. Flood control, water resources utilization, road planning and construction,

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urban renewal and redevelopment, and under-developed areas currently cannot justify any satellite observation program; any such application of satellite observation capabilities is obviously a by-product, and not a plausible explanation for the flights. Photography applicable to all of these functions is much more easily, quickly and cheaply obtained today by use of aircraft, and the informed international community would easily and quickly conclude that if these purposes are in fact the objective of the U. S., then it is absurd to choose satellites rather than aircraft as the basic vehicle. From a reconnaissance viewpoint, the aircraft is also technically superior to the satellite. The ground resolution obtainable is directly proportional to the altitude and inversely proportional to the combined resolution of the optics-mechanism-film-atmosphere-processing chain, with the result that the (relatively) low altitude of aircraft permits photography of better resolution. Thus, however the situation may change in the future, the only presently justifiable reason for taking reconnaissance photographs of the earth from a satellite is to serve as an inferior, however acceptable legal substitute for the obtaining of such photography by illegal aircraft overflights. No amount of public discussion of satellite reconnaissance or of ancillary derivatives can mask this fact from any countries who choose to object to such flights.

(2) Release of satellite reconnaissance photography will disclose the technical capability of the collecting equipment. Without such release,

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the Soviets must estimate the nature of the collecting system and its likely capability. In addition to being uncertain, this process involves consideration of various possibilities that might be used; disclosure of photography confirms both the approach and the intelligence capability.

(3) Reconnaissance photography, particularly of the Soviet Bloc, will be an exceptionally interesting matter to the public. Disclosure of such photography would certainly provoke a substantial increase in publicity of reconnaissance activities. Correspondents and others would undoubtedly try their hand at becoming amateur photograph interpreters, making their own investigation of Soviet military capability by tabulating missile sites, airfields, etc., which they think they can identify and count in the released photography, or, conversely, noting the absence of such things in the photography. This could not fail to result in considerable publicity and would certainly be more provocative to the Soviets than the absence of such photographs and publicity.

h. While the electronic signal elements of the program may attract less public interest, they may in fact attract Soviet interest approaching that caused by photographic reconnaissance. Effective electronic signal reconnaissance can identify significant characteristics of many aspects of essential military electronic devices and installations, including new types of radar, guidance equipment, location of all warning and tracking equipment, etc, as well as acquire communications intelligence. Since

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the most effective countermeasure would be to turn off such equipment when a collecting satellite is in range, the operation and timing of electronic satellite reconnaissance is extremely sensitive. There is certainly no reason to expect that this type of reconnaissance by satellite is more acceptable to the Soviets than photographic reconnaissance.

i. Aside from simplifying Soviet countermeasures, release of reconnaissance photography would reveal what has been covered at the time of such release and what we could, and therefore probably have learned from this photography. The Soviets would easily identify what we have not discovered, while we cannot identify what we have not discovered. The result would be that the Soviets could tell more easily than we what the actual balance of military capabilities are at a given time, clearly an advantage to the Soviets and not to the U. S.

j. Although it is true that the Soviets can locate and track our satellites, this process is much easier and faster if notice of launch and even rough orbital data is released. Without such data, initial detection is not certain on the first few orbits, particularly if the launch was not expected. Up to several days can be required to determine the precise ephemeris which some possible methods of active countermeasures would require.

k. The fact that the U. S. is actively engaged in developing satellite reconnaissance has been in the public domain for several years. These

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activities have been officially confirmed with numerous official statements describing their general purpose and intent. They have also been publicly described as completely peaceful and posing no threat to any nation. The first officially acknowledged satellite reconnaissance flight was launched over a year ago. Although very general facts of these activities are public knowledge, details of the technical approaches involved are not known to the public.

1. The critical U. S. need for satellite reconnaissance is a continuing, not a temporary problem. It will not disappear when the initial Soviet ICBM deployment is complete. Subsequent deployment of later versions of newer missiles will be much more difficult to locate, particularly if the Soviets give any consideration to concealing them from the outset of such deployment. It will also be extremely important to monitor the actual operational status of deployed missiles. For these reasons, high acuity satellite reconnaissance will continue to increase in importance.

3. Specific Objectives. In view of the factors noted above, there are some specific characteristics which appear to be required of the policy which is adopted:

a. Public and political emphasis must be focused on the unclassified aspects of the U. S. space activities, with full exploitation of their open character. However, we must not be drawn into conducting all space programs on this basis, or into a constant public defense of why we don't.

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b. We should avoid provocation that could support Soviet counter-action. Consequently, all public information on the subject of satellite reconnaissance should be kept in very low key.

c. We should avoid forcing the Soviets to take counteraction. Consequently, all things which could not be internally ignored by the Soviet leaders should be carefully avoided. As an example, future confirmation by the President that we are obtaining reconnaissance of the Soviets by satellites and will continue to do so could not possibly be ignored by the Soviets. It would not matter what additional words of justification were used; such an unimpeachable confirmation would likely repeat the U-2 situation in this regard. It would not matter at all whether the Soviets already knew this for certain; they would not be forced to act on such knowledge. However, public confirmation from the highest level of government could not be ignored.

d. We should not compromise the effectiveness of present reconnaissance satellite developments. This will require protection of the details, technical approaches, timing of missions, and both qualitative and quantitative results.

e. We should avoid any compromise of future ability to conduct effective satellite reconnaissance. This requires protection of our right and capability to conduct unannounced launches from both fixed and movable bases, to use multiple decoys of various types without the

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necessity of identifying them as such, and the ability to conduct completely unidentified flights so that actual reconnaissance flights cannot positively be distinguished from other satellites.

f. We should take irreversible steps only if the most compelling justification has been thoroughly substantiated by careful and searching review. For example, the declassifying of presently classified aspects is irreversible, as is the confirmation of provocative facts by the President or other officials, or the public release of any reconnaissance results.

4. Policy. In view of the foregoing considerations, the following policy appears adequately defensible and fully responsive to the national interests:

a. Basic Posture. The U. S. conduct of satellite reconnaissance activities is a legal, non-aggressive, military activity, conducted in accordance with international law and completely consistent with the U. S. and the U. N. policies on the peaceful uses of outer space. These activities are necessary to national defense, and pose no threat to any nation. Existence of these activities has been publicly acknowledged, and will continue to be acknowledged. However, the existence of any reconnaissance results will neither be confirmed nor denied. These are not open activities, and details are classified. They do not require further defense, and in particular, will not be described as or implied to be scientific or utilitarian experiments.

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b. Management and conduct of effort. The U. S. satellite reconnaissance activities will be conducted indefinitely within the Air Force Systems Command and will not be associated with traditional military operational commands. There will be no conventional "operational" program; the entire operation will be conducted in low key within the research and development activities of the Air Force.

c. Security. These activities will be conducted under very tight security procedures which confine exposure of program details to the fewest possible people and documents. All mission timing, collection system details, and qualitative and quantitative results will be carefully protected from public disclosure by any means.

d. Publicly observable operations. These operations will be protected to the maximum practical extent. Names and nick-names for all military space projects will be discontinued, and no identification will be made as to the specific mission of any military satellite launch at the time of launch or during flight. Subsequent disclosure that certain missions have been conducted will be done in a manner that will not retroactively identify the specific launch. Other appropriate steps will be taken to make it increasingly difficult to identify reconnaissance activities with certainty.

e. Public information. All public information on satellite reconnaissance activities will be handled in very low key. Essentially all

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releases will be answers to direct query, following prepared guidance. The activities will not be discussed, except as outlined in the prepared guidance. This guidance will consist of the basic posture statements contained in this policy, together with answers to questions based upon this policy and the context of material included in the position paper for the U. S. delegation, dated March 13, 1962, entitled "Initial Meeting of the U. N. Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space." Answers will be straightforward, factual, and not defensive or apologetic. No details will be given and the answer to many questions will simply be a straightforward "No comment."

f. U. N. Registry. The U. S. registry reports to the U. N. will consist of those objects in sustained orbit or transit at the time of each report. Short-lived satellites which are out of orbit only a few days after launch will not be registered. (This practice in no way restrains the U. S. from releasing special reports on any flight having broad international interest, such as MERCURY flights, etc.) The U. S. will not agree to its proposal to the Disarmament Conference to give advance notification of space launches under any conditions other than as an integral part of total and complete disarmament.

g. Protection of information source. In any case where decision is made to make a public or private disclosure to the Soviets concerning some item or items of our knowledge, extreme care will be taken to

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avoid any disclosure or even implication that the source of this knowledge was satellite reconnaissance.

**5. Implementation.**

a. Many of the steps required to implement the policy outlined have already been taken, or are currently being taken. The management structure is already established, and the satellite reconnaissance activities have been completely disassociated with operational military commands and are being conducted entirely within the Air Force Systems Command.

b. A secret Department of Defense Directive (No. S-5200.13) was published on March 23, 1962 which institutes a new security and public information policy for all military space programs. Names and nicknames will no longer be used for any military space projects. Recognizing that it is impractical to selectively protect certain military space programs while continuing an open launch policy for others, since to do so would merely emphasize sensitive projects such as reconnaissance, this new policy applies equally to all military space projects. When fully implemented, it will establish the capability to launch, control, and recover military space vehicles without public knowledge of the timing of these actions or of the specific mission involved.

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c. The only outstanding action required to fully implement this policy is to prepare written guidance and brief a number of key government officials so that they will act consistently and will not violate the policy inadvertently in the course of various government actions, or in event of innocent or hostile questions on the subject.

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